Unit Overview

We believe that your visit to the Newseum, along with this unit of study on media ethics, will help you and your students better understand the guidelines and principles journalists use to report stories. We believe this knowledge will help students better understand the role of the free press and become more informed and critical news consumers.

By actively participating in this unit, including pre-visit activities, a Newseum experience and post-visit activities, students will come to understand the three guiding principles of journalism: fairness, accuracy and clarity. Students become editors and reporters and grapple with real-life ethical decisions that journalists are faced with every day.

Our guiding question in this unit — What principles guide how journalists work? — engenders a number of additional questions that will be good to keep in mind as you take advantage of your Newseum visit:

- How has investigative journalism changed events in America and the world?
- What standards do journalists use when reporting?
- How have anonymous sources affected people’s perceptions about the media?
- How are issues of bias and fair reporting addressed by journalists?

We appreciate your willingness to share with your students the benefits of viewing, hearing, reading and touching the elements of the First Amendment through which the Newseum brings history to life.
# National Standards of Learning

## National Council for the Social Studies: Curriculum Standards for Social Studies

**Students will be able to:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explain how information and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.</td>
<td>1. Culture Middle Grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predict how data and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.</td>
<td>1. Culture High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investigate, interpret, and analyze multiple historical and contemporary viewpoints within and across cultures related to important events, recurring dilemmas, and persistent issues, while employing empathy, skepticism, and critical judgment.</td>
<td>2. Time, Continuity, and Change High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply knowledge of how groups and institutions work to meet individual needs and promote the common good.</td>
<td>5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions Middle Grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyze the extent to which groups and institutions meet individual needs and promote the common good in contemporary and historical settings.</td>
<td>5. Individuals, Groups, and Institutions High School</td>
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</table>

## Center for Civic Education: National Standards for Civics and Government

**Students will develop an understanding of:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political communication: television, radio, the press, and political persuasion. Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions on the influence of the media on American political life.</td>
<td>II.E.3.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The public agenda. Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions about how the public agenda is set.</td>
<td>III.E.1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public opinion and behavior of the electorate. Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions about the role of public opinion in American politics.</td>
<td>III.E.2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forms of political participation. Students should be able to evaluate, take, and defend positions about the means that citizens should use to monitor and influence the formation and implementation of public policy.</td>
<td>V.E.3.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### National Center for History in the Schools: National Standards for History — U.S. History

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The student understands contemporary American culture.</th>
<th>Era 10 Standard 2D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explain the influence of media on contemporary American culture. [Explain historical continuity and change.]</td>
<td>Era 10 Standard 2D 7-12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### National Council of Teachers of English: Standards for the English Language Arts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students: Read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.</th>
<th>Standard 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).</td>
<td>Standard 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.</td>
<td>Standard 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).</td>
<td>Standard 12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Pre-Visit Activities

Dear Educator,

We are looking forward to welcoming you and your class to the Newseum for the Media Ethics school program. These two quick activities will introduce your students to some of the topics and concepts we will explore together in more depth during the visit. Enclosed you will find the following activities:

- Exercising Ethics and News Judgment
- Anonymous Sources in Our Daily News

We hope these activities help you and your students get excited about your upcoming field trip. We’ll see you soon!

Newseum Education Staff
Exercising Ethics and News Judgment
Ask students to locate and bring into class three recent newspaper articles with photographs. They are to exercise their news judgment and find stories they are interested in reading.

Questions that they should consider include:
1. Is this a story that the public needs to know? Why or why not?
2. Does the information in the story affect a lot of people or only a few?
3. Is this a story about an event that already happened or a future event?
4. Is the photograph needed to tell the story?
5. Does the story contain more rumors than facts?
6. Does the story or photograph invade someone's privacy?
7. Is the story or photograph sensational or does it blow something out of proportion?

Anonymous Sources in Our Daily News
Have students look through a newspaper and find at least two examples of stories that use anonymous or unnamed sources. These are people who give reporters information but don’t want their names published. The source might be identified in stories as a person familiar with the investigation, a senior White House official or a neighbor who didn't want to be identified.

Questions that you may ask students include:
1. What are the articles about? Are these controversial topics? Why or why not?
2. Why do you think the person wanted to remain anonymous? Was he/she embarrassed or trying to embarrass someone? Not supposed to be talking with the media? Fearful of losing his/her job or of retribution?
3. Are there any named sources?
4. Why would a reporter use an anonymous source?
5. Does the fact that the person doesn’t want to be identified affect the reliability of the information? Do you believe the story more or less?
Post-Visit Activities

Dear Educator,

We hope you enjoyed your recent visit to the Newseum. Attached please find two activities about media ethics to further the conversation with your students that began at the Newseum. These can be discussed as a class or assigned as homework. We hope these situations help extend the experience and allow you to apply concepts that were presented in the Media Ethics lesson.

Newseum Education Staff
Scenarios

You are the editor of your school’s newspaper. In each of the following scenarios, you are asked to consider a situation. Make a decision about who you will cover, what your angle will be and what you will publish. Will yours be an ethical decision? Include in your answer whether **accuracy**, **fairness** or **clarity** is in question.

1. A student at your school is highlighted on the local TV news. A reporter for the school newspaper uses information from the TV newscast without giving credit to the station. It turns out that several facts from the news report are wrong. **Do you admit the mistake? Do you tell how you got the incorrect information?**

2. A well-known musician is filming an anti-smoking PSA (public service announcement) at your school. The school newspaper photographer gets pictures of him smoking a cigarette during a break. Your photo editor wants to run the photograph with the cutline “Rock Star Filmed Anti-Smoking PSA on Tuesday.” **Do you reword the caption?**

3. The owner of a local business has refused to buy an advertisement in your newspaper. He graduated from your school, so you are really ticked that he won’t support his alma mater. Later that day, as you look at the sports spread, you notice that the photo of the cross country track event that the sports editor plans to use has a billboard in the background with the local business’s name prominently displayed. It would be easy to remove the billboard with photo-editing software. **Do you alter the photograph?**

4. The daughter of the principal at your rival high school has been arrested on drunken driving charges. **Do you report it?**

5. One of your best friends says she saw the new basketball coach smoking marijuana at a rock concert. You tell the newspaper adviser that someone told you about seeing him and that you plan to report it in your concert review. The coach tells you he wasn’t even at the concert. **Do you report the allegation?**
Scenarios: Answer Key

1. Yes. It is a core value that journalists are accurate. And reporters should do their own reporting.

2. Yes. The cutline implies the picture was taken during the filming of the PSA. Clarity is important in cutlines as well as in stories.

3. No. Photographs should reflect the truth. Truthfulness includes accuracy of details in the setting in which the action takes place.

4. Perhaps. Why are you reporting this story? If only to cloud the reputation of the rival school’s principal, don’t publish it. Do you regularly report students who are arrested on DWI charges? Is the daughter 18 or older? Be fair, and treat this story as you would any other story.

5. No. You need facts. Rumors and mistaken identification have no place in a newspaper. By the way, what’s this information doing in a concert review?
Fairness Formula Starts With Accuracy
By Charles Overby

People who talk with the Freedom Forum about news complain that the media can and should do a better job. Most newspeople tell us the same thing. So what's the problem?

A lack of attention to basics. In meetings with small groups around the country, we encouraged people to talk about fairness in the media. The topic quickly became a broad umbrella for complaints in general about the media. Most of the complaints focused on the basics of news gathering and presentation. From those discussions, I have broken down the components of fairness into five basic categories that provide an easy-to-remember formula: A+B+C+D+E = F (fairness).

Accuracy + balance + completeness + detachment + ethics = fairness. There are other ways to state it, but these five categories generally capture most of the complaints we have heard about the need for fairness and improvement in the media. Many editors and news directors may think the components are so basic that their news reports meet those standards easily. But many of the people whom we interviewed do not think so. The public expects all five categories — not two or three — to be applied to all news stories. A quick look at the five categories:

ACCURACY — This is the basic component of fairness, but it generated lots of discussion, especially in the area of corrections. Most newspapers still do a superficial job of correcting their errors. Procedures often are not reader-friendly. The better newspapers run more corrections, not fewer, every day than average newspapers. Unfortunately, it is rare to see corrections on television.

BALANCE — Many in the public think stories reflect definite points of view. Often, the other side is given scant, secondary attention, far down in the news report.

COMPLETENESS — This was the biggest complaint that we heard. Our respondents said reporters fail to tell the whole story because of inexperience, ineptitude, laziness, or lack of space or time. The lack of completeness affects context.

DETACHMENT — A frequent complaint lodged by people who deal with the media was that reporters and editors construct their stories in advance and only want news sources to confirm their preconceived notions. Once the news “hook” is established, there is not much fair and open reporting that follows.
ETHICS — This involves the way reporters and editors pursue stories, the feeling that editorial viewpoints drive news content, placement and headlines. This category also focuses on the methodology of reporting, ranging from paparazzi photography to insensitivity to victims. These five areas need more discussion in newsrooms. If the public could see improvements and regular explanations about these basic elements, they probably would develop more trust in the mainstream media. This isn’t rocket science. Every editor and news director should be capable of identifying ways to improve these deficiencies. For those news executives who think they are doing just fine in all these categories, bring in a dozen readers or viewers and ask them.

Charles L. Overby is chairman, chief executive officer and president of the Freedom Forum and chief executive officer of the Newseum.
A + B + C + D + E = Fairness

Read “Fairness Formula Starts With Accuracy.” Written by Charles L. Overby, chairman, chief executive officer and president of the Freedom Forum and chief executive officer of the Newseum, this article sums up the five essential components of fairness.

1. Define each of the following terms as used by journalists and expected by the public.

   Accuracy __________________________________________________________

   Balance __________________________________________________________

   Completeness _____________________________________________________

   Detachment ________________________________________________________

   Ethics ____________________________________________________________

Answer the following questions on your own paper.

2. Write your own definition of fairness.

3. Why is accuracy so important to readers?

4. Select a topic that is currently in the news. Who would you interview to provide balance in an article on the topic or for more in-depth coverage of the issue?

**Topic: Interviewees** (three or more, name and title, reason for selection)

5. Read an article from today’s newspaper. Evaluate whether it meets the “completeness” test. Has the reporter given a full account of the story? What else might the reporter have been expected to know by the time the newspaper went to press? What else do you want to know?

6. What guidelines would you give a young reporter to remain detached?

7. Write a statement of policy to guide ethical reporting by your newspaper staff.